



Gender, sexuality and identity

Federation is committed to protecting the industrial, professional and civil rights of its gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) members as well as the rights of all gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. Federation builds on commitments it made in the 1996 Decision of Annual Conference, *NSW Teachers Federation Policy on Sexual Orientation and Gender Preferred Identity*.

The discriminatory practices of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexism and monosexism are infringements of members' rights, the rights of students we teach and the rights of individuals within the communities in which we work, and must be challenged and eliminated.

Background

The gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities in NSW are diverse. So too are the experiences and understandings of individuals in these communities. There are many different ways individuals express their gender identity, sexuality and sense of belonging.

Some choose to be "open" about their gender identity and sexuality. Some choose not to disclose their gender identity or sexuality to others. Others have no choice.

The experiences of gay, lesbian, transgender and intersex people are also influenced by cultural background, socio-economic status, ethnicity, geographical location, Aboriginality, ability, religious beliefs, families and the communities in which they live.

There are groups and activities within the GLBTI community that provide opportunities for individuals to meet and socialise. There are groups that lobby to represent the political and legal interests of the community. Social, emotional, medical and service groups address the welfare needs of the community.

The community is known to be vibrant and friendly. The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, for example, is one of the best known gay and lesbian community events in NSW. It is both a community celebration and a political statement providing participants, who visit from around the globe, a range of theatre, film, exhibitions, forums, a fair day and a parade and dance party.

Attitudes to issues related to people of diverse sexuality and gender have changed significantly in Australia over the past three decades. Legal equality is recognised in most areas of legislation but inequality still remains.

There is much evidence to suggest that tolerance towards people of diverse sex, sexualities and genders has also improved over this time and yet sadly discrimination, violence and harassment of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people continues within our community. Research reports confirm that people who are or are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex experience disproportionate levels of violence and harassment compared to the general population.¹

Research also tells us that a significant proportion of this harassment and violence occurs in schools.² Even young children have been shown to express negative understandings about gays and lesbians; some using homophobia as a powerful way to marginalise, harass or ostracise other children.³

Heterosexism and homophobia

In Australian culture, heterosexuality is the accepted norm and deviations are often marginalised, ignored or demeaned.

Incidents of homophobic violence including verbal abuse, spitting, offensive gestures, graffiti and other written taunts (including social networking and texting), stalking, threats and physical attack are reported frequently to police. NSW Police are also aware of a large number of unreported attacks due mostly to the victims' fear of experiencing more harassment for making their complaint public or the fear of disclosing their sexuality.⁴

Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia impacts on the health and well-being of people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender people and their families and friends in many ways. Research suggests that homophobia both increases risks associated with a range of health problems as well as risks associated with social exclusion and isolation which, in turn, limits opportunities and abilities of people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender to form social, personal and intimate relationships.⁵ Homophobia may also have an impact on an individual's academic participation and performance as well as influence professional relationships.

Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia is often unthinking, that is not conscious or intentional. In schools, for example, it can be manifest in assumptions that all students and all staff are heterosexual, or an expectation that the parents of a student will be a male and a female.

All teachers have a professional, moral and legal obligation to intervene in discrimination and harassment based on sexual/gender orientation. Children report most incidents of homophobic abuse occur in schools. Those students feel that homophobia is unchallenged and that the school system is either oppositional or silent about homosexuality.

The Federation is concerned that the proliferation of unqualified chaplains through the Federal Government program poses a risk to students in our schools. Students deserve increased access to qualified professional counsellors.

Schools and other Department of Education and Communities (DEC) workplaces

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people participate in education.

Students in educational settings are developing their own sense of gender and sexuality. Their educational experiences will influence their future and decisions they make as adults. Many of these lessons are about gender and getting their gender “right”.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are:

- teachers
- principals and directors
- consultants, managers, curriculum writers and advisors in our education system
- parents/caregivers, wider family/friends of students
- aides, cleaners, office staff, general assistants, tradespeople and contractors in our schools and TAFE colleges.

Some sexuality and gender issues and you

From an early age children learn important lessons about being a girl or a boy. The students we teach are challenged by peers, school structures and school cultures, media and the wider community to get their gender “right”.

Boys and men, girls and women are not homogenous groups. In fact there may be differences between groups of boys and the differences between groups of girls are far greater than the differences between boys as a group and girls as a group.

Dominant femininities and masculinities are often celebrated and endorsed by families, peers, popular culture and institutions such as schools. They change over time, place, culture, geographic location, socio-economic groups and sexuality.

Some of the femininities and masculinities that are celebrated, endorsed and accepted in schools and the community often ignore, marginalise or demean other ways of being masculine or feminine. Homophobia is an example of the way this happens.

Early childhood

Children come to school from a variety of cultural, racial, religious and family backgrounds. Early childhood teachers are experienced in meeting the individual needs of their students and accepting that this diversity needs to be reflected in their classrooms.

Students at this level of schooling are aware of gender differences. They may also be immersed in heterosexist family, peer group and popular culture values and practices. Research shows that even very young children are aware of the power of homophobia to harass and ostracise other children.⁶

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in the early years of schooling include:

- modelling family diversity. Using a range of age appropriate resources in the classroom to affirm and celebrate the diverse families from which the children come
- allowing and encouraging non-gender specific free play, for example boys dressing up and girls using construction materials
- encouraging and welcoming same-sex parents/caregivers in classroom activities
- intervening to stop bullying, name calling and gender stereotyping
- developing plans that manage school organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students and teachers
- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse.

Primary school

Primary teachers are aware of the role both social development and engagement in schooling plays in the ways students understand their gender. Teachers recognise sex-based harassment, including homophobia, knowing that children use it as a powerful way to “police” gender in primary schools.

Students at this level of schooling are experimenting with understandings about gender. These ideas are sometimes used to marginalise, ignore or demean others who are “different”. This occurs both in the classroom and on the playground. Getting your gender “right” is beginning to be important to children of this age and this contributes to a heterosexist culture in primary schools.

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sexuality and gender in primary schools include:

- encouraging and welcoming same-sex parents/caregivers to be part of school activities
- ensuring libraries in schools contain gender inclusive resources which portray a range of families for teachers and students to access
- developing awareness of classroom strategies and resources to address issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender people

- fostering inclusive classroom practices that celebrate diversity
- intervening to stop bullying, name calling and gender stereotyping
- naming homophobia when it occurs and addressing it explicitly in school policies and plans
- developing plans that manage school organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students and teachers
- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse.
- schools will display materials, sent by Federation, which indicate the school support for “gender and sexual diversity”.

Secondary schools

High school teachers recognise the place the peer group plays in influencing understandings of gender and sexuality. They know that many of their students have begun to experiment both socially and sexually, and recognise sex-based harassment, including homophobia, knowing that students use it as a powerful way to “police” gender in high schools.

Students at this level of schooling have well-formed ideas about gender. These ideas are often used to marginalise, ignore or demean other students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, those perceived to be, or those “different” to the accepted gendered behaviour. Much effort is taken by many students to prove they have their gender “right”. This behaviour contributes to a heterosexist culture in high schools.

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in high schools include:

- developing awareness of classroom strategies and resources that address issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender people, including resources that address cyber-bullying
- purchase gender inclusive resources
- ensuring sexuality is included, as appropriate, in resources that support the teaching of health and personal development
- use resources and teaching practices that acknowledge diverse sexes
- fostering inclusive classroom practices that celebrate diversity
- intervening to stop bullying, name calling and gender stereotyping
- naming homophobia when it occurs and addressing it explicitly in school policies and plans
- developing plans that manage school organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students and teachers, not management of the student alone
- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse.
- schools will display materials, sent by Federation, which indicate the school support for “gender and sexual diversity”.

Post-compulsory education

Teachers of students in the post-compulsory years recognise that these students, generally, are mature, independent and resourceful and provide teaching and learning experiences to cater for this.

Students at this level of education have a complex understanding of gender. Most recognise that dominant forms of masculinities and femininities are valued in our culture, including in educational institutions, and that differences are marginalised, ignored or demeaned. Homophobia remains a powerful way students “police” their masculinities and femininities.

Strategies for addressing issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in post-compulsory schooling include:

- ensuring that student work placements are free from harassment and providing appropriate policies and work practices that support issues that affect people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender people
- including sexuality, as appropriate, in resources that support the teaching of health and personal development
- fostering inclusive practices that celebrate diversity
- course resources and content to be GLBTI inclusive
- intervening to stop bullying, name calling and gender stereotyping
- naming homophobia when it occurs and addressing it explicitly in workplace policies and plans
- developing plans that manage workplace organisation in relation to transgender and intersex students, not management of the student alone
- accepting and welcoming colleagues who may be sexually or gender diverse
- colleges schools will display materials, sent by Federation, which indicate the support for “gender and sexual diversity”.

Action 1: Fostering respectful relationships and inclusive practices in institutions

Federation recognises that beliefs, understandings and expectations about gender impact on people of diverse sexuality and gender as well as heterosexual people.

Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexism and monosexism are discriminatory and are rejected.

Federation will call on the:

- 1.1. Federal and State Governments to ensure their anti-discrimination laws cover all aspects of law relating to people of diverse sexuality and gender. This should include, but not be limited to, laws on marriage, adoption, IVF and age of consent.
- 1.2. State Government to commit to the inter-agency

Strategic Framework 2007–2012, *Working Together: Preventing Violence Against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People*, which identifies educational environments as key sites of hostility and violence for people of diverse sexuality and gender.

- 1.3. State Government to involve unions in both the evaluation of the Strategic Framework, *Working Together: Preventing Violence Against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People*, and the development of future Government policies relating to people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- 1.4. DEC to update policies and advice to workplaces that address issues related to people of diverse sexuality and gender and to provide explicit direction for primary, high and central schools on their responsibility to address homophobia, biphobia and transphobia through whole school programs at all levels of schooling.
- 1.5. DEC to implement monitoring procedures to ensure that workplace programs, policies, organisation and procedures in relation to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people comply with relevant legislation and duty of care obligations.
- 1.6. DEC to support workplaces in addressing issues specifically related to transgender or intersex students, staff or parents. This could include, but not be limited to, assisting schools to manage school organisation in relation to a transgender/intersex student, teacher or parent.
- 1.7. DEC to modify enrolment forms to be inclusive of people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender identity.
- 1.8. DEC to include union representatives on committees that address issues related to people of diverse sexuality and gender.
- 1.9. Universities to ensure homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexism and monosexism be included in the content of pre-service training of all teachers.

Action 2: Fostering respectful relationships and inclusive practices in educational settings

Federation recognises that respectful relationships are developed when gender differences are acknowledged and accounted for rather than ignored or dismissed and limited notions about gender are challenged.

Federation will call on:

- 2.1. DEC to make the gender equity policy, *Boys and Girls Education Strategy*, mandatory in schools and to fully resource its implementation. This includes, but is not limited to, employing DEC officers specifically responsible for assisting schools address gender issues, funding gender

projects in schools, writing and distributing gender resources to schools and participating in gender research in schools.

- 2.2. DEC to develop and distribute anti-homophobia/biphobia/transphobia resources to all workplaces.
- 2.3. members to reject homophobic language such as, “that’s so gay”, “faggot”, “lezzo”, “shim”, “no homo” in educational settings by developing resources to assist members do this.
- 2.4. Members to recognise heterosexist practices with the help of appropriate resources developed by Federation and distributed to workplaces.
- 2.5. DEC to assist members to challenge homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and other discriminatory behaviour facilitated by the use of technology including social networking sites and texting.
- 2.6. DEC to support members to work with their parent/caregiver organisations to address homophobia/biphobia/transphobia.
- 2.7. DEC to develop and deliver training and development for staff on issues related to people of diverse sexuality and gender in education.
- 2.8. DEC to assist workplaces to develop whole school management of issues related to people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender.

Action 3: Fostering respectful relationships and inclusive practices in the curriculum

Federation recognises that inclusive curriculum development provides positive educational experiences for people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender.

Federation calls on the DEC and the Board of Studies to:

- 3.1. ensure that age appropriate teaching about issues related to people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender occurs in all educational settings
- 3.2. ensure that curriculum materials are written using inclusive language
- 3.3. ensure that diverse sexes, sexuality and gender is included, as appropriate, in all resource materials that support the teaching of health and personal development
- 3.4. develop and distribute teaching resources that support the teaching of issues surrounding people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in all educational settings
- 3.5. develop and distribute a list of educational resources that address issues relating to people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender, suitable for use in primary and high schools
- 3.6. ensure that vocational education policies, procedures and practices reflect contemporary understandings of the needs and issues related to people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender. This includes, but is not limited to, career guidance and responsibilities of employers and support

structures for people of diverse sexuality and gender involved in vocational education

- 3.7. ensure that sex education policies, procedures and practices reflect contemporary understandings of the needs and issues related to people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender.

Action 4. Industrial rights and working conditions of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex members

Federation is committed to protecting the industrial and professional rights of its members. These rights must be the same for all members.

Federation asserts the rights of GLBTI members and will campaign for the elimination of discrimination towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in education.

Federation will:

- 4.1. promote the general welfare, personal, civil, industrial and curriculum rights of people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender
- 4.2. ensure that industrial agreements contain a positive clause on the rights of people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender
- 4.3. call on DEC to provide appropriate and relevant training programs for teachers on issues related to people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender in education, including pre-service training, and the development and distribution of appropriate teaching resources
- 4.4. develop Trade Union Training, and other training opportunities, for members on issues related to people of diverse sexuality and gender in education
- 4.5. represent the employment rights of members of diverse sex, sexuality and gender including, but not limited to, leave, recruitment, appointment, promotion, transfer, superannuation, health and welfare and ongoing employment
- 4.6. develop resources to support members of diverse sex, sexuality and gender and ensure they are supported professionally and personally at the workplace to the same extent as any other member
- 4.7. call on DEC to raise awareness of the occupational health and safety risks to members associated with homophobia/biphobia/transphobia. This includes, but is not limited to, violence and harassment, stress, fear and depression
- 4.8. recognise the family responsibilities of members of diverse sex, sexuality and gender by supporting members' access to all leave and conditions applicable to workers with family responsibilities including, but not limited to, paid maternity or paternity leave in relation to the birth or adoption of a child, extended unpaid leave for the

purpose of child rearing, IVF and family leave for the purpose of care and support of a partner and/or child.

Action 5: Addressing issues related to people of diverse sexuality and gender in our union

Federation is committed to ensuring the rights of all employees and members are protected.

Federation is an Equal Employment Opportunity employer and committed to ensuring the rights of all gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex employees are maintained.

Federation will:

- 5.1. initiate and coordinate a staff development program so that all Officers and staff are better able to further the welfare and rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex employees and members
- 5.2. maintain a GLBTI members' Special Interest Group to identify and clarify members' needs, concerns and conditions
- 5.3. elect a Restricted Committee consisting of six members, elected from the membership, to inform policy and actions.
- 5.4. establish union buildings as "safe places" for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people by applying a pink triangle sticker and subscribing to the Safe Places Project led by AIDS Council of NSW
- 5.5. participate, where possible, in relevant research regarding issues related to people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender
- 5.6. participate in Australian Education Union gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex meetings
- 5.7. that representatives to Australian Education Union national executive, conference and forums continue to ensure that the Australian Education Union has representation as appropriate, at Education International Conferences and associated forums and Workers Out Conferences and associated human rights conferences. In addition, we call on the Australian Education Union to continue to lobby the ACTU to put appropriate structures in place to support GLBTI workers, and for these workers to have input to ACTU policy
- 5.8. be active in promoting safe workplaces for people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender both nationally and internationally
- 5.9. support member attendance at conferences and courses that address issues related to diverse sex, sexuality and gender
- 5.10. collaborate and cooperate with GLBTI community groups to support gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in education

5.11. maintain public support of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex community by participating in GLBTI community events.

Some terms explained

bisexual: an individual whose emotional and sexual attraction is to both men and women, including transgender people

biphobia: fear and/or intolerance of people who are bisexual

cross dresser: an individual who wears clothing most often associated with members of the opposite sex. Cross dressing is not necessarily connected to sexual orientation, nor is it synonymous with transgender or drag entertainment. This term is now used instead of transvestite

drag: an entertainer who dresses and acts in styles typically associated with the opposite sex

gay: an individual whose emotional and sexual attraction is towards people of the same sex. The term is most commonly applied to men, although some women use this term

gender identity: an individual's emotional and psychological sense of being female or male

heterosexism: the presumption that heterosexuality is universal and/or superior to homosexuality. Prejudice, bias or discrimination is based on such presumptions

homophobia: a fear and/or hatred of lesbian and gay men and of their sexual desires and practices that often leads to discriminatory behaviour or abuse.

homosexual: an individual whose emotional and sexual attraction is towards people of the same sex

intersex: an individual born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia or an internal reproductive system that is not exclusively either male or female. Parents and doctors will usually determine the sex of a child resulting in surgery or hormone treatment. Some believe this should not happen. This term is now used instead of hermaphrodite

lesbian: a woman whose primary emotional and sexual attraction is towards other women. Some women prefer to be called gay

monosexism: describes the belief that all people are attracted to only one sex. It is manifest in the pressure bisexuals experience to identify as either heterosexual or homosexual

pink triangle: a gay pride symbol. It was the symbol gay men were required to wear in Nazi concentration camps during World War 2. Lesbians sometimes use a black triangle

transsexual: an individual who lives, or identifies with the sex opposite the one which she or he was born. Transsexuals may or may not have surgery and can be any sexual orientation

transgender: an umbrella term that refers to people whose physical and/or sexual characteristics may not match their gender identity. Some cross dressers, drag entertainers and intersex individuals may also identify as transgender

transphobia: fear and/or intolerance of people who are transgender that can often lead to discriminatory behaviour or abuse.

Footnotes

1. 'You shouldn't have to hide to be safe': A Report on Homophobic Hostilities and Violence Against Gay Men and Lesbians in New South Wales, Attorney General's Department of NSW, 2003; also Lynne Hillier, Alina Turner and Anne Mitchell *Writing Themselves in Again: 6 Years on. The 2nd National Report on the Sexuality, Health & Well-being of Same-sex Attracted Young People in Australia*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, Melbourne, 2005.
2. Ibid.
3. Cherry Collins et al *Gender and School Education*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, 1996.
4. Network of Government Agencies (NSW) Strategic Framework 2007-2012: Working Together: Preventing Violence Against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People, NOGA, 2007.
5. Hillier, Turner and Mitchell *Writing Themselves in Again*, op. cit.
6. 1996, Collins, et al.